

SSSC meeting

October 3, 2003

(Held in Room 470 of the Governor's Office Building)

Attending:

Keith Russell, Office of Administration
Ron Hooker, Agriculture
Glenda Verslues, Conservation
Steve Taylor, Corrections
Patsy Fletcher, Corrections
Bryan Howard, Elementary and Secondary Education
Aurita Prince-Caldwell, Health and Senior Services
JoAnne Flowers, Higher Education (Univ. of Mo.)
Mark Doerner, Insurance
Steve Dunn, Labor & Industrial Relations
Patrick Murphy, Mental Health
Debbie Meller, Mental Health
Dr. Joe Parks, M.D., Mental Health
Stephan B. Moody, Natural Resources
Tom Fast, Revenue
Jerry Allen, Revenue
Dean Powell, Revenue, CCERT
John Giles, Social Services
Sue Teeter, Social Services
Jean Endsley, Transportation
John Schumert, OCCU-TEC
Janice Steenburgen, Office of Administration

Jean Endsley opened the meeting and stated that we had a full agenda. Then she turned the meeting over to John Schumert, who discussed the need to update the name cards used at the SSSC meetings to accurately reflect each agency's current official representative to the committee. He passed around a sheet for people to sign.

Jean then had the committee members introduce themselves and then she introduced a presentation by Dr. Parks from the Department of Mental Health and Aurita Prince-Caldwell from the Department of Health and Senior Services on "suicide." Jean indicated the presentation was timely from the perspective of her agency, MoDOT, because of a death and another injury to two employees because of an asleep-at-the-wheel motorist; when the motorist regained consciousness and learned of the accident, she became suicidal. Employees too are often affected through survival guilt.

Dr. Parks, the medical director at the Department of Mental Health and a psychiatrist, indicated they have been working on the issue of suicide prevention as a statewide initiative for a number of years. Dr. Parks discussed the state's governmental role; House Bills 59 & 269, passed and signed last year, required the Departments of Health and Mental Health to develop an inter-agency suicide prevention plan. A draft plan has already been produced and will ultimately be presented to the General Assembly. Many state agencies face suicide issues with their clients and employees: teens, the elderly, people on probation are all at higher-than-average risk. It is the ninth most common cause of death, with 31,000 deaths annually in the U.S., 710 in Missouri. (Missouri's rate is slightly higher than the national average.)

Before discussing the Department of Health and Senior Service's "gatekeeper" program, Aurita Prince-Caldwell discussed the many risk factors associated with suicide. Gun use and a sense of "isolation" or "disconnection" with family and society were factors. Men, the elderly and the young are at higher-than-average risk, as are unmarried people and those living in the more western states (save California). While it cuts across all socio-economic lines, it affects whites most often. Biophysical risk factors include mental disorders, alcohol and other substance abuse, "hopelessness," impulsive and aggressive behavior and a history of trauma and abuse. Major illness and family histories of suicide are also factors. Environmental factors, such as the loss of a job, financial difficulties, relationship break-ups also play a role. Cultural and religious beliefs, as well as a hesitancy to seek out help, are also factors.

After showing a video, Aurita discussed the gatekeeper program, which utilizes the concept of "QPR," which can be thought of as "CPR for suicide." "QPR" stands for "Question / Persuade / Refer." It is not a form of treatment or counseling, but instead, part of a "team" approach in which the family member, friend or co-worker can provide hope through positive action.

Between the time a person decides that suicide is the solution to their problems until the time they actually attempt to carry it out, there is a period of time in which they decide how and when to do it, what they need to wrap up, etc. During this period, you may be able to perceive certain warning signs or clues. During this time, QPR can be employed.

Aurita discussed a number of myths associated with inaction. It is a myth that not acting is acceptable because the person will inevitably commit suicide anyway. It is also a myth that talking to the person will anger them into actually carrying out their plans. So, there should be no fear of acting. Experts are not the only ones who can prevent a suicide; we all have powers of persuasion.

Suicidal people *do* talk about it; it is another myth that those who talk about it do not commit it. You should pay attention to clues like statements such as "I can't go on" or "my family would be better without me." Other clues are depression, moodiness, hopelessness, putting ones affairs in order, substance abuse, unexplained anger, being fired, death of a spouse, termination of a relationship, diagnosis of a major illness, financial problems, and feelings of being a burden on ones family.

If these signs are noted, you should talk to the person in private. You should be persistent. You can ask them, for example, whether they have been unhappy? Then, whether they have been very unhappy, so unhappy they wouldn't mind not waking up. But, it is less important "how" you ask the question than actually asking it. Allow the person to talk freely. Then, offer them "hope" in any form. Know where you can refer them for help and either take them yourself or arrange for an appointment and get a commitment from the person to follow through. Follow up with visits, phone calls or whatever it takes to let them know you care. "Hope" prevents suicide.

Aurita ended with the observation that, following the death of several family members Abraham Lincoln was suicidal as a youth; but that, through the intervention of friends, he was able to get through the crisis and go on to have a enormous impact on his society.

Dr. Parks suggested the committee members consider who within their agencies would be good candidates for "gatekeeper" training. He also suggested we remember the number 1-800-SUICIDE, which is a national crisis hot line that can put people in touch with local resources. They also passed out materials with other, local resource numbers.

After taking a break, Jean asked the committee to review the minutes from the last meeting. While they were doing that, Jean mentioned that the Department of Revenue plans to hold a class on checking the driving records of state agency employees. The contact person for this class is Jerry Allen. In addition, Janice Steenburgen mentioned that O.A. now has a fleet management program that is exploring how to assist agencies in checking such records, managed by Cindy Dixon. The goal is to streamline the process. Jean commented that employees are reluctant to use their social security numbers, and SAM II can't handle state employee numbers, so problems may persist. After this discussion, the minutes of the last meeting were approved.

The meeting was then turned over to Keith Russell, who discussed "the Capitol Complex Emergency Response Team" (or "C-CERT") which is a collection of volunteers with first-responder experience who will be available to respond to a mass-casualty situation. He passed out a list of the 34 current members, who are placed in 5 squads. They have received a \$40,000 federal grant, which will be used in part for pagers for the various volunteers. Keith introduced Dean Powell, who is a member of the Team. He said they meet every other month for training, which includes the FEMA "Community Response Team" of "CRT" training, which covers eight basic areas like medical care, fire-fighting and search and rescue. While the team members have a considerable amount of experience between them, he said it would be nice to have additional volunteers from outside the immediate geographic area who could come in should the need arise. Keith said they are willing to assist Departments interested in forming such teams for other locations. The various Departments have themselves helped with C-CERT by authorizing the participation of their personnel on the C-CERT team, in writing.

Next, Jean discussed an article from *Industrial Hygiene News* on behavior-based safety. She said the article discussed 4 major causes of accidents and 4 major types of accidents.

Focusing on them might be able to reduce accidents by as much as 80%. She was considering suggesting that we make them recommended focal points for state agencies next year. She will save this topic for the next meeting.

Next, Jean showed us a video on working with the families of employees who are killed or injured. The video was the story of Ron and Dot Hayes, who lost their son Patrick in a grain bin accident. They subsequently formed “Families In Grief Holding Together” or “F.I.G.H.T.” The video discussed their advocacy of workplace safety. One aspect of their program is encouraging the use of “safety boards,” which are bulletin boards with the pictures of workers’ family members, to help remind the workers themselves and their co-workers who else will suffer in the event of a serious injury or death.

Later, Patsy Fletcher of the Department of Corrections discussed their “Peer Action Care Team Responders” or “PACT Responders” assistance program. They have 185 responders so far and will be training another 50. The training helps people identify employees who are stressed out or at-risk due to personal problems or who have been assaulted at work or have seen others assaulted. It helps them retain employees. The responder will help the employee with things like funeral arrangements, court appearances, and so forth. It has been well received by employees. It interfaces with their EAP program, and workers’ comp, plus other local and state programs. The initial training takes one week, with annual refreshers. They have a manual. Her e-mail is pfletcher@mail.doc.state.mo.us Her telephone number is 522-8457.

During the roundtable discussion, Keith Russell discussed the upcoming workplace violence programs O.A. would be offering. Jean discussed domestic violence and its difference from workplace violence (the former springs from “control” issues, the latter from “anger” or “frustration”). Jean suggested that different programs would be needed to address the two.

Bryan Howard brought up the topic of concealed weapons. Keith Russell said their lawyers in light of the recently enacted law are discussing the issue of concealed weapons in state buildings. He said that we might not be able to prohibit weapons in the “public” areas of buildings. He may have David Mosby give a presentation in the future.

The next meeting was scheduled for January 9th, for Room 750 of the Truman Building.

Minutes by Mark Doerner

